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A-209 NO. | CONFIDENTIAL | HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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INFO : Bangkok, CINCPAC (for POLAD), DANANG, VIENTIANE

POLAD
ANALYSIS BRANCH

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON

DATE: September 20, 1967

SUBJECT : Conversation with [ ]

REF :

EXCISE

Transmitted as an enclosure to this airgram is a memorandum of conversation between Embassy officers and [ ], National Assembly deputy and defeated Upper House candidate. Conversation centered on the recent elections, the upcoming Lower House election, and Catholic political activity.

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Action assigned to UN

Action Taken NOTED

Date of Action 10/9/67

Action Office Symbol E/NN

Name of Officer

Enclosure: As Stated

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Joan Lyons DATE 12/24/81
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants: [redacted] National Assembly Deputy;
David McMeans, Embassy Officer;
David Lambertson, Embassy Officer.

Place: [redacted] Saigon.

Date: September 18, 1967.

Dinner conversation with [redacted] covered the following subjects:

Upper House Election: [redacted] a member of defeated Upper House slate number [redacted] and composed mostly of pro-Ky members of the National Assembly), expressed some skepticism about the honesty of the Upper House election. He noted that the provision in the electoral law allowing voters to cast from one to six ballots provided a convenient cover for manipulation of returns, since it is impossible to know how many total ballots were cast. However, while implying that the government may have juggled the figures a bit, [redacted] did not go so far as to term the election fraudulent (which one of his running-mates, [redacted] has done; see Saigon [redacted]). While he was disappointed in the defeat of his own slate, [redacted] is not inclined to attribute it to cheating. Instead he blames himself for having chosen the wrong horse in this race. [redacted] claims he was offered a place on the slate of Nguyen Gia Hien, but declined, thinking a more broadly-based list would have better prospects for victory. (Comment: [redacted] made a relatively strong showing in last year's CA election, and may well have been offered a spot on Hien's list. Slate number 42, which [redacted] joined, finished 21st.)

Catholic Role in Upper House: Despite his defeat, [redacted] appears to derive a vicarious satisfaction in the victory of his fellow Catholics. He predicted that the Catholic members would form a bloc in the Upper House, which would assure smooth relations between the Upper House and Thieu. He admitted that non-religious factors may take precedence in determining bloc loyalties in the Upper House, and conceded that the Catholics' interests might better be served by retaining a relatively

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low posture in the Upper House rather than striving for too overt dominance. Nonetheless, he predicted that the Catholics would form a bloc and would try to elect one of their own as chairman of the Upper House. [redacted] thought that Nguyen Van Huyen or Tran Van Lam would be the most likely choices. (Until Emboffs mentioned it, [redacted] had been unaware of the replacement of Phan Ba Cam's slate by that of Tran Van Lam. He was visibly pleased to hear of Lam's good fortune. Note: Lam was President of the National Assembly, 1959-1960.)

Lower House Election: [redacted] said that the Lower House race would be quite a different story; Catholics will be unlikely to dominate it as they did the Upper House election since it will be run on an individual constituency basis in which the ability to marshal a large nationwide vote for particular candidates will not be a factor. Buddhists and other non-Catholic groups will make a relatively better showing, thus providing a healthy balance to the heavily Catholic Upper House. [redacted] was himself a candidate for the Lower House, but withdrew (after his Upper House defeat). He believes that, in Gia Dinh province at least, the Lower House election will be even more of a lottery than the Upper House contest; he prefers to wait and try again another day. Another reason for his withdrawal, although he did not explicitly say as much, appears to be [redacted] feeling that double-filers will face a tough grilling during the Lower House campaign. He cites the case of Nguyen Huu Thong, defeated in the Upper House race and running for the Lower House in Gia Dinh, as an example. [redacted] predicts Thong will be condemned as an "opportunist" and, despite his considerable prestige in Gia Dinh, will have a difficult time winning.

[redacted] noted that, although Catholics are not likely to win to the same extent as they did in the Upper House, they nevertheless will be out in force for the Lower House race and will do well in Saigon, Gia Dinh and Bien Hoa. He said, for example, that the wife of Diem's secret police chief, Tran Kim Tuyen, is a candidate in Bien Hoa. [redacted] predicts that, because of her husband's reputation (rather than in spite of it) Mrs. Tuyen is likely to do very well. [redacted] believes that Mrs. Tuyen's candidacy, as well as the election of some Diem-era personalities to the Upper House, is a sign that Catholics involved in the Diem government are re-emerging from a four-year period of political inactivity.

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Presidential Election: [redacted] was interested in Emboff's views of the current difficulties between Thieu and Ky, and agreed with Emboffs' comments that it is extremely important for Thieu and Ky to settle their differences amicably. With regard to the presidential election, [redacted] once again expressed some skepticism as to the honesty of the exercise. He agreed that the National Assembly should examine the election and vote on its validation in an impartial and objective manner. However, [redacted] noted that it is possible that the Assembly could discover "major irregularities", such as orders through military channels to support Thieu and Ky, which would seriously call into question the validity of the election. [redacted] did not give the impression, however, that he expects such startling evidence to appear.

Comment: [redacted] is a personable and bright man, although something of a dilettante. He did not make a significant impact in the Assembly. [redacted] plans to run again, for the Upper House in three years or the Lower House in four. In the interim, he sees the possibility of studying political science in the United States for a year or so as an appealing prospect. [redacted] is hardly a man of the people. He is obviously wealthy (drives a luxurious new Citroen) and quite cosmopolitan. Several of his brothers and sisters are in Europe, apparently for good. [redacted] and has just completed 10 years of military service (as a captain). He, [redacted] which at least one of them, [redacted] attributes to intervention by Prime Minister Ky). [redacted] is an admirer of Prime Minister Ky and accompanied him on his trip to Australia and New Zealand during the spring of this year. However, he was not one of the more important members of Ky's group in the Assembly.

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